

NATIONAL
GALLERY OF ART

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WASHINGTON, D.C. August 10, 1965: John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced today the acquisition of three paintings, to be put on view today in a special exhibition reviewing recent European accessions.

The three new paintings are: a rare North Italian Renaissance panel, The Wife of Hasdrubal with Her Children, by Ercole Roberti; an unusual portrait of an English nun, Elizabeth Throckmorton, by the French court painter Nicolas de Largillière; and a French Renaissance miniature, Portrait of a Man, by Corneille de Lyon. All three were purchased through the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.

The exhibition will include, in addition to these pictures, other recent accessions by the Gallery: Rubens' Tiberius and Agrippina, The Assumption of the Virgin by Miguel Sithium, and the XV Century French primitive painting, A Knight of the Golden Fleece. Accessions of the past season on view elsewhere in the Gallery include the two large Guardi paintings, now permanently installed in the main staircase; nine new American paintings, most notably the Copley Watson and the Shark; and the 88 Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and American paintings that continue on view in the special exhibition of the Chester Dale Bequest.

Describing the panel by Ercole Roberti, Bernard Berenson, in his classic Italian Painters of the Renaissance, wrote that it has

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"a vehemence so passionate, an unrestraint so superhuman, that we surrender to /it/ as we do to every noble violence, happy to identify ourselves with /its/ more vividly realized life."

The picture is generally believed to represent an episode from the Third Punic War. Hasdrubal's wife, hearing of her husband's submission to Scipio Aemilianus (146 B.C.), throws herself and her children into the flames of the burning Temple of Eshmun at Carthage. Fragments of the ruined temple with tongues of flame bursting out between them may be seen at the bottom of the picture, and the mood is reinforced by the vivid red drapery background.

Ercole Roberti (circa 1456-1496) worked for the House of Este in Ferrara. Influenced by Mantegna, the artists of the Ferrarese school exhibit a passion for antiquity, expressed in hard outline and rigorously modeled form. The Hasdrubal panel, earlier known as "Medea and Her Children", probably formed part of a series extolling womanly virtues. Together with Brutus and Portia, in the Cook Collection, and a third composition attributed to Roberti, Lucretia, Brutus and Collatinus, now in Modena, the series was probably intended as decoration for furniture, and may have been designed for the betrothal of Isabella d'Este to Francesco Gonzaga in 1490. The Gallery's painting (oil on wood, 18-1/2 x 12 inches) was formerly in the collection of Sir Francis Cook. It has been frequently exhibited in Europe.

The portrait of Elizabeth Throckmorton depicts a member of an English Roman Catholic family. Refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy to the English kings, with its implication that the King was the Head of the Church, the family fled to Paris, where its

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members were painted by the leading French portraitist of the time, Nicolas de Largillière (1656-1746). Elizabeth Throckmorton (1694-1760) took vows in the Paris house of the Augustinian "Blue Sisters", where she had been educated, and of which she was to become four times Mother Superior. The Throckmorton family later returned with the portraits to England, and the others in the series may still be seen at the family seat at Coughton Court, Warwickshire, now a National Trust property.

Although born in Paris, Largillière had much contact with the northern tradition in his early career. His formative years were spent in Antwerp, and he lived for six years in England, returning there in 1685 to paint the portraits of the Roman Catholic King James II and Queen Mary. Largillière is principally known for his courtly, artistocratic portrait style which embodies the sumptuousness of the early French Rococo. In this portrait, however, painted when the artist was 73, we are reminded of his earlier contact with the more direct northern tradition, and of the severity of the portraits painted in France in the previous century by the Fleming, Philippe de Champagne. The picture, 32 x 25-7/8 inches, is signed on the back of the canvas and dated 1729.

The Portrait of a Man is the first picture by the important French portraitist Corneille de Lyon to enter the Gallery's collection. Although born in The Hague, Corneille settled in France at Lyon, and was made a French subject by Henri II in 1547. Corneille's patrons seemed to have been almost exclusively members of the court, but in Lyon he had a kind of picture gallery consisting of a large room hung with portraits, and

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it is believed that he had a workshop providing repetitions of his court paintings to the public. The master's own works are small in size, and, as can be seen in the Gallery's new portrait, they are distinguished by a soft, fragile touch that his followers and imitators could not reproduce.

The panel, only 6-1/2 x 5-5/8 inches, is in a carved antique French frame inset with marble and mother-of-pearl. It was previously in the Spencer-Churchill collection in England. The picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy in the French Art exhibition of 1932, and at the Masterpieces of French Art show in Paris in 1937.

The special exhibition of recent accessions is on view in Gallery 60-B in the East Wing. The Gallery's new summer hours, through Labor Day, are 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and 12 noon to 10 p.m. on Sunday.

8" x 10" color transparencies and black-and-white glossy photographs available for publication on request from the office of the Assistant Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565. Area code 202, 737-4215, ext.242.